Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in L2: An Affective Construct of Language Learning Process

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Abstract: *This study aims at investigating willingness to communicate (WTC) construct, which is developed to determine language learners' willingness to communicate, reviewing the relevant literature and suggesting further directions for future research. WTC has become a recent addition to language learning research since the last four decades. Several studies, which investigate the relationships between WTC and other variables of language learning process, have been conducted for a long time. Yet, current research, limited to the same research perspectives and designs, hampers the diachronic development of the conceptualization of WTC. This paper is devoted to the study of WTC in the relevant literature as well as suggestions for further studies.*

Keywords: *willingness to communicate, language learning, language learners.*

Yabancı Dilde İletişim İstekliliği: Yabancı Dil Öğrenme Sürecinde Duyuşsal Bir Yapı

Öz: *Bu çalışma, yabancı dil öğrenme sürecinde öğrencilerin iletişim istekliliği düzeylerini belirleyen 'yabancı dilde iletişim istekliliği' yapısını ve bu yapıya ilişkin çalışmaları incelemeyi ve ilgili araştırmaların bundan sonraki yönelimine ilişkin saptamalar ve öneriler getirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Yabancı dil öğretimi araştırmalarının son kırk yılında iletişim istekliliği kavramı ve bu kavrama dayalı olarak ortaya konulan yapı alan yazında önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. İletişim istekliliğinin yabancı dil öğrenme sürecindeki diğer pek çok değişkenle ilişkisini ele alan deneysel çalışmalar uzun yıllardan beri süregelmektedir. Ancak yapılan çalışmaların genellikle aynı doğrultuda ve birbirine benzer nitelikte araştırma desenleriyle gerçekleştirilmesi bu alandaki çalışmaların artsüremli gelişimini engellemektedir. Bu araştırmada, iletişim istekliliği konusundaki çalışmaların genel çerçevesi incelenmiş ve gelecekte yapılacak araştırmalar için kimi öneriler sıralanmıştır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *iletişim istekliliği, dil öğrenme, öğrenenler.*

I. Introduction

Language learners are expected to develop their communicative competence regarding the purpose of language learning defined as "authentic communication

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between persons of different languages and cultural backgrounds" (McIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998, p. 559). Since the last four decades, the theoretical and pedagogical implications of the research have promoted the significant role of communication in foreign or second language (L2). The willingness to seek out communication opportunities should be the main aim of foreign language learning (MacIntyre et al., 1998). This conceptualization has led willingness to communicate (WTC) emerge as a recent affective construct for individuals communicative preferences in L2 (Yashima, 2002). WTC found its way to the studies in L2 with the emergence of a pyramid model developed by MacIntyre et al. (1998), soon after it was developed for the communication tendencies in first language by several scholars of 70s and 80s (Burgoon, 1976; McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). The term, in foreign language contexts, is defined as 'a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2' (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547).

WTC in L2 has been investigated in regard to its relationship with several other variables of language learning process or learners. This study aims at exploring WTC studies in terms of their research focus or variables in an attempt to shed light on current research and practice.

II. WTC in L2

A. Sociocultural factors

The relationships between WTC and several sociocultural factors have been investigated in various contexts. Zeng (2010) studied the sociocultural factors that enhanced or limited WTC levels of Chinese students at a Canadian community college in and outside class. The study revealed that Chinese students were mostly willing to communicate in English and this willingness had a relationship with their perceived communication behaviors, but not with their international posture. Mahdi (2014) studied the WTC in English of the EFL students at King Khalid University (KKU) when they have an opportunity and highlights the personality traits that affect students' oral communication in English. The results indicated that personality traits greatly affect WTC in two communicative situation types, meetings and public speaking, and two interlocutor types, acquaintances and strangers. Similarly, the effects of personality traits were moderate with regard to group discussions and interpersonal conversation situations and friends as a type of interlocutor. Lu (2007) investigated the differences in WTC between Americans and Chinese in China and in the United States, and the factors contributing to these differences. The results indicate that overall immersion experiences were found to have positive effects on WTC. Americans were more willing to communicate cross-culturally than Chinese. The longer participants stay in a different culture, the more they are willing to communicate cross-culturally. Also, this study revealed that participants are more willing to communicate when they get older. In another research with this kind of context, Lu and Hsu (2008) explored the differences of WTC between Americans and Chinese living in China and the United States, and the

factors affecting WTC between these two nationalities. Americans were more willing to communicate with Chinese than were Chinese with Americans. Participants living abroad reported higher levels of WTC than those living in their home country. Self-perceived communication competence, language competence, immersion time and motivation have a positive correlation with WTC among Chinese and Americans. Zhong (2013) studied five Chinese immigrant learners' WTC in both teacher-led and collaborative learning situations in L2 classrooms and concluded that the participants' WTC was context-dependent. Linguistic factors, socio-cultural factors, self-efficacy and learner beliefs had joint effects on their WTC in the teacher-led context. Gallagher (2012) investigated the impact of WTC on the daily hassles and stress of international students. The researcher stressed that no direct link exists from L2 WTC to intercultural communication hassles. Ghonsooly, Khajavy and Asadpour (2012) studied WTC construct and its underlying variables among non– English major students in Iran. The results indicate that L2 self-confidence and attitudes toward international community were two predictors of WTC in Iranian context and motivation to WTC and openness to experience to L2 self- confidence was not significant. The factors underlying Korean learners to use English in some particular situations were investigated by Edward (2006). According to this study, the quality and quantity of previous contact with non-Korean world influence the language use significantly and this also support the WTC theory. Weaver (2010) investigated the extent to which 1,789 Japanese university students' willingness to speak and write in English to a Japanese student, an international student, a Japanese teacher of English, and a foreign teacher of English varied inside an EFL classroom. The findings focus the interpersonal nature of L2 communication, and provide important insights into how different types of interlocutors can help maximize students' level of L2 WTC.

B. Motivation

According to Zhang (2012) the preliminary research of WTC was based on the causal relationships of personal factors such as motivation and attitudes to WTC in L1. Motivation is a topic of interest for WTC studies in L2. Yousef, Jamil and Razak (2013) studied Malaysians' WTC in English as a second language (ESL) and they came to the conclusion that language learning communication strategies directly affect motivation, self-perceived communication competence, and WTC in English, while motivation influences WTC indirectly through the two variables self-perceived communication competence and communication apprehension. Knell and Chi (2012) focused on the roles of motivation, affective attitudes and WTC, language anxiety and parental support on immersion and non-immersion students in China and they concluded that immersion students had higher levels of WTC compared to their non-immersion peers. Lahuerta (2014) studied the variables believed to affect Spanish undergraduates' WTC in English. The results show that motivation to learn English had a significant relationship with WTC, self-perceived communication competence and WTC have a positive relationship,

while anxiety and self-perceived communication competence have a negative one. Self-perceived communication competence and L2 competence have a significant relationship and gender differences play a crucial role on WTC. Yashima (2002) examined the WTC in second language in Japanese EFL context. The researcher points out that international posture influences motivation and this influences proficiency. Motivation affected self-confidence in L2 communication which led to WTC in L2. Munezane (2014) investigated foreign language learners' WTC, frequency of L2 communication, and eight individual difference variables hypothesized to influence them: L2 learning anxiety, L2 learning motivation, integrativeness, international posture, ought-to L2 self, ideal L2 self, L2 linguistic self-confidence, and valuing of global English. It is outlined that there is significant potential for enhancing L2 WTC by applying motivational strategies that enhance or develop second language learners' ideal L2 self and females generally exhibited higher measures for L2 WTC and ideal L2 self. Peng and Woodrow (2010) conducted an in depth study investigating WTC in Chinese English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classrooms. The implications of this study can be outlined as follow: classroom environment predicts WTC, communication confidence, learner beliefs, and motivation. Motivation influences WTC indirectly through confidence. There is a direct effect of learner beliefs on motivation and confidence. Jung (2011) examined Korean EFL students' perceptions of willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. The results showed that students had low WTC and the variables that directly influenced WTC in English were English communication confidence and motivation. Attitudes indirectly affected WTC in English, through motivation to learn English. Students' attitudes and their personality correlated with each other. The communication model provided in the present study was supported by previous research in EFL contexts in terms of the paths from communication confidence to WTC. The path from motivation to WTC, however, was not supported by some previous research findings (Bektaş Çetinkaya, 2005; Kim, 2004; MacIntyre and Charos, 1996; Yashima, 2002). Liu and Park (2013), in a quantitative research paper, investigated the relationship between WTC and motivation in Korean context. They found that instrumentality prevention, motivated behavior, ought-to self and family influence were the motivation components correlated with WTC of the learners.

C. Oral Skills

The relationship between WTC and oral skills – communicative performance – of language learners have been investigated in terms of classroom activities. Khazaei Zadeh and Ketabi (2012) aimed at examining the effect of class size on the Iranian EFL students' WTC among three different class sizes. The results of the study indicated that class size had a significant effect on the students' WTC since small classes give more opportunity to students to practice oral skills and communicate. Öz, Demirezen and Pourfeiz conducted a study revealing EFL learners' perceptions of WTC in Turkish context. The results indicated that communication competence and communication apprehension were the strong predictors of WTC. Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide and Shimizu (2004) assumed that WTC results in more frequent communication in L2 and that the

attitudinal construct international posture leads to WTC and communication behavior and they conducted a study examining WTC in L2 with Japanese adolescent learners of English. The study reveals that frequency of communication correlates with satisfaction in interpersonal relationships. D'amico (2010) investigated the effects of short-term Spanish study in study abroad (SA) and at home (AH) contexts on oral fluency and WTC. This study revealed that WTC significantly increased over time for the SA learners but not for the AH learners. There was not a correlation between WTC and higher fluency scores, and the researcher underlined that further research is required to highlight the relationship between WTC and fluency. Léger and Storch (2009) conducted a study examining learners' perceptions of their speaking abilities, of their contributions to oral class activities as well as their attitudes towards these activities, and how such perceptions and attitudes influenced the learners' WTC in L2. It is concluded that the students' perception of the speaking activities and of themselves as learners in the foreign language classroom affected their WTC in a range of ways.

D. Classroom Settings

The question whether being inside and outside classroom settings are decisive on learners' WTC has been examined by several scholars. Peng (2013) examined measuring WTC in the Chinese context and identifying the factor structure underlying the L2 WTC scale adopted from the literature. The results indicate that the participants reporting WTC in classroom situations outnumbered those expressing WTC in out-of-class situations. MacIntyre and Doucette (2009) underlined that there is a relation with the lack of WTC inside and outside the language classroom and tendencies for a disruption in action control. The dynamic and trait conceptions of WTC were also discussed. Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011) investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) inside and outside the classroom and their language learning orientations. The study indicated language orientations to be more correlated with WTC outside than inside the classroom. Shea (2014) examined student perceptions regarding the use and design qualities of an augmented reality (AR) mobile game in the language learning process and the effect of these qualities on student perceptions of their WTC. It is suggested AR mobile games can provide a viable means to take language learning outside the classroom and into self-selected spaces to affect positively students' WTC. Zhou (2012) investigated WTC and its related antecedents and outcomes in learning Mandarin as a heritage and foreign language. The result shows that L2 communication anxiety predicts learners' perceived competence. When learners have higher perceived competence, they are more willing to communicate in Mandarin in classroom, which leads to higher WTC outside classroom. Atay and Kurt (2009) conducted a mixed-method research in order to explore the factors affecting Turkish EFL learners' WTC. Their study revealed that some learners have higher level of WTC both inside and outside the classroom. Their study is significant as they used a mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative methods.

E. Personality Traits

Personality traits, such as big five personality traits, are closely related to WTC. Several studies reveal this relationship. Öz (2014) conducted a study focusing on the relationship between personality traits and WTC in a second language (L2 WTC). He came to the conclusion that the interaction of the big five personality traits may greatly contribute to the production and promotion of WTC in learning a second or foreign language. Cao (2011) studied the dynamic and situated nature of WTC in second language classrooms by stressing that the previous studies mostly focused on its trait dispositions. This study, which investigates situational WTC, reveals that individual characteristics such as self-confidence, personality, emotion and perceived opportunity class, classroom environmental conditions such as topic, task, interlocutor, teacher and group size and linguistics factors are the ones that create students' WTC in class. Matsuoka (2006) studied individual difference variables, consisting of integrativeness, communication apprehension, perceived competence, introversion, motivational intensity, attitudes and other-directedness, affected Japanese university students' WTC in English as well as their English proficiency, and how these variables affect one another. The results reveal that perceived competence, introversion, communication apprehension, motivational intensity and integrativeness were statistically significant predictors of L2 WTC, and that perceived competence and L2 WTC were statistically significant predictors of L2 Proficiency. Donovan and MacIntyre (2009) investigated age and sex differences in willingness to communicate (WTC), communication apprehension, and self-perceived communication. The participants were high junior, high school and university students. Results show that junior high females are higher in WTC than their male counterparts and females at the university level are higher in communication apprehension and lower in self-perceived competence than are male university students. There is a negative relationship between apprehension and self-perceived and it does not vary with age or sex. The degree to which communication apprehension and self-perceived competence predict WTC varies with age and sex. Communication apprehension is a significant predictor of WTC among women while self-perceived competence emerges as a significant predictor of WTC among men. Khatib and Nourzadeh (2014) aimed at developing and validating a WTC questionnaire for instructional language teaching and learning contexts. Six instructional WTC (IWTC) components were made up: communicative self-confidence, integrative orientation, and situational context of L2 use, topical enticement, learning responsibility, and off-instruction communication. A 42 items questionnaire was first piloted with 218 Iranian English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) learners and the obtained data were submitted to exploratory factor analysis. A clear six-factor structure questionnaire was created. Zarrinabadi and Haidary (2010) examined the relationship between WTC and identity styles of Iranian EFL learners. It is concluded that WTC and self-perceived communication competence are positively correlated with informative and normative identity styles, while negatively correlated with diffuse-avoidance and also communication apprehension is positively correlated with diffuse-avoidance and negatively correlated with informative and normative identity style. Elwood (2011) studied WTC of three personality variables in the L2 field: extroversion, ego

permeability, and perceived distance from one's core persona. The results indicate that extroversion plays an important role in models of L2 WTC.

F. WTC: A trait-like or situational model

A Chinese L2 WTC model by Wen and Clément (2003) indicates a systematic change in the conceptualization of WTC from merely being trait-like to being trait-like and situational. Actually, MacIntyre et al. (1998) had also studied the situational nature of WTC. Yet, it took some time to start sustained research on defining the nature of WTC, whether a trait-like or situational model. Kang (2004) proposed that situational WTC in L2 can dynamically emerge and fluctuate during a conversation situation and this emerged from the joint effect of three interacting psychological conditions of excitement, responsibility, and security. In the end of the study the researcher came with a new definition of WTC, suggesting it as a dynamic situational concept. He stresses that as a dynamic situational concept, WTC may change moment-to-moment, rather than a trait-like pre-disposition. Kim (2004) examined the reliability of MacIntyre et al.'s model based on whether WTC is more trait-like than situational, in explaining WTC in English among Korean students before its application to the Korean context. The results of the study indicated that implying WTC is more likely to be trait-like than situational, MacIntyre et al.'s model was reliable in the Korean context. Barjesteh,Vaseghi and Neissi (2012) examined the perceptions of Iranian EFL learners' and their willingness to initiate communication across four types of context and three types of receiver. The results reveal that Iranian EFL learners are willing to initiate communication in situations experienced before while initiating communication in unfamiliar situations like public speaking is not so easy for them. It is stressed that context- and receiver-type familiarity is an effective factor for the situation in which a learner initiates communication. Cao and Philp (2006) studied the dual characteristics of WTC in L2: trait-like WTC and situational WTC and they reached the idea that WTC has a dynamic nature.

G. Personal Preferences

Personal preferences or choices of learners, such as job, friendship and goals are important in determining their WTC levels. Modirkhemeneh and Firouzmand (2014) investigated five orientations or causes of studying L2: travel, job related, friendship, personal knowledge, and school achievement. The results of the study revealed that application of all five orientations for language learning was poorly correlated with WTC both inside and outside the classroom. Zhang (2011), in his doctoral dissertation study, aimed at revealing the personal and contextual factors hindering and helping students' WTC in English language classrooms in China. This study revealed that peaking English proficiency and low anxiety facilitated students' WTC. MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrod (2001) attempted to reveal that orientations toward language learning as well as social support would influence students' WTC in a second language. They measured

WTC in each of four skills and examined the five orientations or reasons or studying an L2: travel, job related, friendship with Francophones, personal knowledge, and school achievement. The results of the study indicated that there was a positive correlation between these five orientations and WTC and social support had a positive effect on higher levels of WTC outside the classroom but not that much inside the classroom. Munezane (2015) studied the relative effects of two treatments—goal setting and visualization—on enhancing WTC. Results suggest that the visualization treatment alone was not effective in enhancing learners' WTC and when visualization was combined with goal setting, the increase in learners' WTC was significantly larger compared to the visualization group.

H. Anxiety

The relationship between WTC and anxiety has been investigated by several researchers. Alemi, Daftarifard and Pashmforoosh (2011) aimed at analyzing Iranian EFL university students' WTC and its interaction with their language anxiety and language proficiency. The results indicated that Iranian university students' WTC is directly related to their language proficiency, and also higher proficient learners showed to be less communicative than lower proficient ones outside the classroom, which surprised the researchers. Another result showed that the interaction between WTC and anxiety did not turn out to be significant. This study confirmed the association between language learning experience and L2 anxiety since anxiety and language proficiency were negatively correlated. Bashosh, Nejad, Rastegar and Marzban (2013) investigated the relationship found between shyness, foreign language classroom anxiety, WTC, gender, and EFL proficiency. The results showed that there is no significant relationship between shyness, foreign language classroom anxiety, WTC, gender, and EFL proficiency. In their longitudinal study, Reinders and Wattana (2015) investigated the experiences of five students who had participated in a fifteen-week game-based learning program at a university in Thailand to identify what impact gameplay had in particular on their WTC in English. The results indicated that gameplay had a number of benefits for the participants especially in terms of lowering their affective barriers to learning and increasing their WTC. Chien (2008) studied the relationship between Taiwanese audiences' use of American television programs and their WTC in English. Results indicated that participants with high integrative motivation consuming information from American television programs, in addition, the setting of subtitles were associated with perceived communication competence, integrative motivation, language anxiety and social interaction motivation.

I. Gender

The differences between male and female language learners have caught interest for several variables. WTC is also studied in terms of gender. Munezane (2014) aimed to find out if students' self-reported WTC best predicts foreign language use in the classroom, and also tried to reveal the relations of gender differences, ideal L2 self, and

the effects of visualization and goal-setting activities with WTC. In the end of the study the researcher concluded that there was significant potential for enhancing L2 WTC by applying motivational strategies, self-reported L2 WTC predicted actual L2 use in the classroom lends additional credence to such motivational approaches and gender diversity was preferable to promote active classroom communication. Mohammadzadeh and Jafarigohar (2012) investigated any possible relationship between WTC and multiple intelligences (MI) and the effect of gender on the relationship between these two constructs. The results indicate that MI profile of learners of English has a significant correlation with their willingness to participate in L2 communication and that the link between MI and WTC is affected by gender. Alavinia and Alikhani (2014) conducted an in depth study analyzing the relationship between learners' emotional intelligence and their WTC. In their research, female learners were characterized as the outperforming group both in terms of emotional intelligence and WTC.

J. Achievement and Proficiency

WTC is a construct determining the communicative competence of language learners. Undoubtedly, it aims at increasing the achievement and developing the proficiency in terms of language use and production. The relationship between WTC and achievement of language learners has been studied in multivariate studies. Watanabe (2011) investigated Japanese high school English learners' motivation over time, individual differences and the changes in those differences, their final English achievement and overall academic achievement in high school. The results indicate that students had a growing awareness of the need for practical and communicative English skills in the future. However, this awareness did not lead to greater WTC probably because of various interfering factors. Mahmoodi and Moazam (2014) investigated the relationship between WTC and foreign language achievement of Arabic students and concluded that correlation was significant between WTC and Arabic language achievement. In their study they used a five point likert scale version of WTC in a L2. Baghaei and Dourakhshan (2012) investigated the correlation between WTC and language proficiency. They found that there is a moderate correlation between success and two out of three sub dimensions of WTC construct which was developed in an earlier study by Baghaei (2011). These sub-dimensions are WTC in the school context and WTC with native speakers of English. In their study, WTC with nonnative speakers of English was not correlated with success. The effects of language proficiency on WTC or vice versa have been investigated by several scholars (Afghari & Sadeghi, 2012; Rostami, Kashanian & Gholami, 2016; Valadi, Rezaee & Baharvand, 2015). Among these, only Afghari and Sadeghi (2012), who sought the effect of proficiency on WTC found no significant difference regarding three groups of participants with different levels of language proficiency.

K. Language Skills

Though the structure of current version of WTC, which was developed and revised by MacIntyre et al. (2001) is devoted to only three of four-skills (surprisingly, all versions of WTC constructs ignore listening which is undoubtedly a part of communication), there are several studies investigating the relationship between WTC and 'four-skills'. The original version of WTC, ignoring listening as a language skill to be developed in communication, defines the parts of communication as speaking, writing, reading and comprehension. Yet, the research perspectives include listening to the skills. Shahraki and Sayedrezai (2015) focused on developing WTC in four language skills through decreasing anxiety. Piechurska-Kuciel (2011) conducted an empirical research and analyzed the relationship between students' WTC and self-perceived levels of language skills. She concluded that students with high self-perceived levels of language skills significantly outperform low achievers in terms of WTC. There are some studies investigating how to develop speaking skill of language learners in regard to WTC constructs (Kang, 2014; Morozova, 2013).

L. WTC Reflections in Other Topics

Apart from abovementioned topics, WTC-related studies cover a wide range of topics. In the relevant literature, WTC has been investigated in terms of language learning strategies (Merç, 2014; Yousef et al. 2013); emotional intelligence (Alavinia & Alikhani, 2014; Ketabdar, Yazdani & Yarahmadi, 2014; Mohammadzadeh & Jafarigohar, 2012); learner perceptions (Jung, 2011; Khatebi & Zakeri, 2014; Khodarahmi & Nia, 2014); teachers' role (Zarrinabadi, 2014); ecological understanding (Peng, 2012); and multivariables (Fushino, 2010; Subtirelu, 2014; Wen & Clement, 2003; Yu, 2009).

II. Conclusion

WTC, which has recently been added to affective constructs of L2 research, is gaining popularity for scholars who aim at defining language learning process in terms of communicative competence and performance. Besides, the concept, itself, finds its way to other fields of language research. After giving a detailed analytical review of current research on WTC, this part of the current paper devotes itself to clarify the gaps in the literature for further studies. Clearly, WTC-related research needs to be developed to fill in following gaps:

a. WTC constructs should be revised to enable an equal consideration of all of the language skills. Current WTC models are far from covering all aspects of communication.

b. Research on WTC should go beyond just repeating the correlational studies. The literature is full of research papers investigating 'the relationship between WTC and motivation, skills, proficiency etc.' It has been nearly four decades since the concept was first introduced. Yet, only few revised versions of the original model

have been created. The original WTC needs to be enhanced through innovative statistical and psychometric tools.

c. Most of the WTC studies are limited to one-dimensional research design: quantitative research. Few studies expand the explorations of WTC after conducting the instrument itself. Qualitative methods should be integrated into the process.

d. Current WTC constructs need needs some revisions regarding contemporary sociolinguistic trends such as identity, L2 self and learner autonomy. Researchers may focus on developing various forms of WTC for different contexts.

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